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ABSTRACT

A study invoked the uses and gratifications framework to look at a computerized bulletin board used largely by Indian students. Computer printouts of the first 15 messages entered into the bulletin board for each of 7 consecutive days (for a total of 105 messages) were classified by a human coder into categories of surveillance, diversionary, cultural identity needs of the individual, and social integrative. Results indicated that: (1) participation in what could be viewed as an interactive form of ethnic press served primarily to promote social identity and integration rather than assimilation into their environment; and (2) the bulletin board was used more as a support group (serving cultural identity and social integration needs) than as a newsgroup (serving needs for surveillance of the environment). (Sixty-one references are attached.) (RS)

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"Soc.Culture.Indian": Computer Created Community for Indian Students and Professionals

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"Soc. Culture. Indian": Computer Created Community for Indian Students and Professionals

This paper invokes the uses and gratification framework to look at a computerized bulletin board used largely by Indian students .The findings suggest that participation in what could be viewed as an interactive form of ethnic press serves primarily to promote social identity and integration rather than assimilation into their environment. It also found that the bulletin board was used more as a support group (serving cultural identity and social integration needs) than as a newsgroup (serving needs for surveillance of the environment). The paper draws upon the unique characteristics of the medium (computer mediated communication) as well as the users (Indian students) to understand why the user turns to this particular form of interaction to serve their needs.

Introduction

This paper seeks to investigate to what use technology in the form of a computerized bulletin board used by Indian students on an American university campus or professionals who have recently graduated is put to and how it helps them to cope with a foreign environment. The nature of the computer - mediated communication that allows them to fulfill this role will be investigated. It is hypothesized that:

a) "Soc. culture. indian" would, as its name implied, serve to assist in the retention of cultural identity needs for the individual and promote social identity within the peer group of fellow Indians rather than serve as a medium for the assimilation of this cultural island to the disparate mainstream group that it is surrounded by.

b) "Soc. culture. indian" would serve more as a "support group" (used for cultural identity needs of the individual and social integration) rather than as a "newsgroup" (used for surveillance of environment).

Portrait of the Medium

Computer- mediated communication (CMC) has increasingly captured the attention of scholars in recent years. Before explicating any role played by CMC, it will be fruitful to examine its nature. CMC systems comprise electronic mail, voice mail and computer conferencing besides the computerized bulletin boards that we shall examine in this term paper .

Computerized bulletin board systems (CBBS) are technologies where users append or post messages to a shared file. The most salient feature of the CBBS is the public nature of the information in the bulletin board. Generally, comments posted on a bulletin board are directed toward the entire population of users of a particular system. CBBS are often set up on a microcomputer and usually include facilities for transferring text and program files to and from the host computer, sending private messages, and communicating in a synchronous manner with others who are connected (Myers, 1985a). In technical terms, they are 'asynchronous', 'text-based' and 'fast'. These systems have mushroomed in recent years, though little systematic research has been done in this area. In 1988, the number of boards 'on-line at any given hour' was estimated at 1,000 to 5,000. (Allen, 1988). CompuServe alone had approximately 150,000 subscribers and the penetration rate for personal computers reached 14%. (Levy, 1984). Soc.culture.indian is one such. As with many CBBS, today it is difficult to determine when this was begun and by whom, but it certainly is an active and prolific bulletin board today. It is self-mediated and self-regulated. Most users are in universities or research centers.

Kochen (1978) suggests that the form of linguistic communication used in CMC may very well be neither conversational nor written, but a "new linguistic entity with its own vocabulary, syntax, and pragmatics." In the same vein, Solomon, in a Wall Street Journal article titled "As Electronic Mail Loosens Inhibitions Impetuous senders feel anything goes" talks of how "the aficionados" of the medium must master style and mechanics. Upper-case letters are reserved for genuine electronic shouting, and e-mail hieroglyphics such as ":-)" (tilt your head to the left to see the smiling face) liberally punctuate messages" in the absence of nonverbal cues such as tone, facial expression and other indicators that reveal emotions. The use of jargon and 'flaming' is especially noteworthy. While jargon can be ascribed to play behavior (Myer, 1985b) flaming has more interesting antecedents. Uninhibited verbal behavior, such as profanity and hostility have been attributed to the absence of an established etiquette in the relatively new medium of computer mediated communication, characterized by an absence of regulating feedback. Status differences are less evident, making communication among unequals more egalitarian. This paucity of social context information and lack of widely shared norms of behavior are hypothesized to lead to difficulty in coordinating and comprehending messages, a reduction in social influence manifested in more equal participation, and more impersonal, less-inhibited interaction. (Kiesler, et al., 1985).

Bulletin board systems has several distinctive features, of which interactivity, or the potential for two-way exchanges is perhaps most consequential. A medium with interactive capabilities blurs the lines between interpersonal and mass mediated communication (William & Rice, 1983).

Short, Williams and Christie (1976), in their theory of 'social presence', contend that the capacity of facial expressions, directions of gaze, posture, dress and non-verbal cues all contribute to the degree of salience of the other person in the interaction. They contend that users of any given medium are in some sense aware of others psychologically present when interacting over a medium. This theory of social presence postulates that 'high-bandwidth media such as face-to-face are preferred for tasks that require interpersonal involvement. Low bandwidth media such as print and CMC, are preferred for tasks that do not require interpersonal interaction.(Short, et al.) A link between interactivity and social presence has been noticed.(Williams & Rice, 1983).

Rice (1980) contends that CMC is appropriate for simple information-exchange type tasks, but that more interpersonal uses, such as negotiation and getting to know someone, were thought to be inappropriate. Picot, Klingensberg and Kranzle (1982) found that electronic text was viewed as less confidential, more accurate, more formal, more dependable, less private, and less stimulating than face-to-face communication. Thus electronic mail is assumed to be utilized more for either non-task related activities (socioemotional) or for task-related activities that do not involve complex text or emphasize social relationships. A study by Love and Rice (1985) discovered, based on the content - analysis of transcripts from a computerized bulletin board, that 30% of the total message content was socioemotional.

Despite this increasing interest in this field, however, the academic journals of social science largely ignore these issues, and the bulk of information in this field is found in conference proceedings and unpublished research reports. (Steinfield, 1986)

Portrait of the Man.

What do we know about the person who is the caller? From the content analysis performed, we can assume that the typical user has grown up in India (and is not an American - born offspring of Indian parents who came to America as immigrants) and thus has a deeper understanding of the affairs in the home-country. He (the vast majority of netters are male) probably came to America as either an undergraduate or graduate student, and has continued in academia, though there is a probability that he is in industry. Since the greatest likelihood is that he is a student, it would be fruitful to look at studies on Indian students in the U.S. to determine characteristics that can be attributed to our average bulletin board user.

A number of studies seek to investigate the adjustment process that the foreign national uses to adapt to his alien environment. Attitudes towards the host country (Selltiz and Cook, 1962) social contact with Americans (Goldsen, et al., 1956; Selltiz, et al., 1956); changes in self-attitudes (Bailyn and Kelman, 1962; Morris, 1956) and other social-psychological dimensions have been studied. Based on research findings, we may be able to construct a fairly accurate character sketch of the typical user of the bulletin board under study.

A good deal of evidence suggests that foreign students (at least in the United States) typically go through a cycle in their feelings towards the host country. An initial enthusiasm is typically followed by period of somewhat negative feelings, which precedes a return to more favorable evaluations, though the initial rosy view may never be recaptured. Coelho (1958) reported such a pattern among Indian students.

A reverse pattern however, was predicted for representatives of underdeveloped counties, for whom it was hypothesized that the involuntary return home at the end of the study period would be perceived as a threat. (Becker, 1968). In a study of twenty - seven Indians, it was found that the initial phase (characterized by 'culture shock') and the final phase (characterized by 'anticipatory adjustment' where, much like Festinger's dissonance

reduction, the individual would try and adopt selective attitudes to ease their anticipated return home) were characterized by a relatively hostile attitude towards the United States and a idealization of the home country. The middle phases were marked by a relative detachment from the home country and the compatriot and a less stereotypical and more favorable view of the United States.

One might expect that changes in feeling towards the host country would be accompanied by changes in the opposite direction for the home country, as in the above study. However, there are indications that the contrary may be the case. Coelho (1958), in his study of Indian students, found shifts in the evaluation of the host country (U.S.) roughly paralleled corresponding shifts of that of the home country (India). Thus evaluation of the two were positively correlated.

Under what has been called "the association hypothesis," the C.Selltiz et al. and others have hypothesized that the more interaction there is between members of different cultures, the more mutually favorable attitudes will develop. Association here refers to exposure to the foreign culture primarily through interpersonal relations but also through secondary encounters with such culture. In reference to the large amount of literature concerning "foreign student ghettos" and the observed behavior of foreign students to live together, students from India were among the top of the list in both spending time with other foreign students and in patterns of residence.(Klineberg O. Hull & W.F. IV, 1979).

The language ability of our typical bulletin board user has been identified as positively correlated to general adjustment in the host country (Moriss, 1960b; Deutsch & Won, 1963) which may go in favor of the Indian whose medium of instruction in India was English. We know that he has, at least initially, probably been struck by the 'hurry and movement of American life'. He probably notes the difference in family relationships, the high status of women, the amount of freedom children enjoy, the high standard of living and the high degree of democracy in America. (Selltiz & Cook, 1962,p.8-12). He is probably strongly critical of many aspects of

American life, as compared to foreign students as a whole. Lambert & Bressler (1955) suggest that the visitor's identification with his own country is enhanced when the following is perceived by the visitor:

"a) that people in the host country easily mark him as a stranger because of the high visibility of conspicuous racial and behavioral differences:

b) that there exists a well established stereotype in the host country emphasizing cultural differences;

c) that people in the host country ascribe low status to his home country."

In the study by Useem & Useem (1955) of Indian students who had been in the United Kingdom or the United States, it was found that fewer than one-fourth had been objects of discrimination themselves, but more than three-fourths "knew" of discrimination against others and were upset by it. It has been suggested that the rather hostile criticism of Indian students are a defensive reaction to their feeling that Americans look down on their country. (Lambert and Bressler, 1956). Morris (1960) too suggested that students' belief of 'national status' (determined by a comparison of ratings of the students' own evaluation of their own country compared to what they believed an American's would be) tended to evaluate the United States less favorably if they believed it had an unjustifiably disparaging view of their country.

As compared to his American counterparts who stress personal drive and hard work, he is much more likely to stress discipline, tact, openness to experience, courage and luck. (Triandis et al., 1972). Similarly, Kilby (1971) and Morris (1956c) noted that American students were more activist and self-indulgent while Indian students placed a stronger emphasis on social restraint and self-control.

Brain Drain. As part of a study conducted by Klineberg & Hull, (1979), foreign students were asked about their preference to return to their own country/ remain in the host country. More than half of the respondents from India (52.8%) selected the option "to return to their own country" (as compared to 81% from Kenya and 41% from Hong Kong). The drain of talented individuals form the poorer nations of the world to the U.S. has been cited as one factor in the strained relations between the U.S. and India. (Kaushal, 1975). In a study of graduates of Indian professionals residing in the U.S., 'push' factors from the home country have been identified such as similar curriculum patterned on Western models and taught in English. For the most part, "poor facilities and low salaries" were cited as reasons for perceiving a return to the home countries as a threat. The 'pull' factors that were identified were expectation of 'greater economic potential and wider opportunities for advanced study'.

There is some evidence that there is a resistance to assimilation among Indians in America, as evidenced in the reluctance to take on American practices such as the permitting dating among the young (Gibson, 1988) due perhaps at least partially to the strong traditional ties to a strikingly different culture. However, some studies suggest that the length of time spent in the U.S.A. appears to be related to their assimilation of a new cultural milieu, as evidenced by endorsement of typically American values. (Bhatt &Fairchild, 1984).

Defining some of the constructs of interest that are used in this paper at this stage would serve to dispel misunderstanding . Social identity as used in this paper conveys how others identify the person in terms of broad social categories or attributes such as age, occupation, ethnicity, etc. Assimilation is a process by which diverse ethnic and racial groups come to share a common culture and have equal access to the opportunity structure of a society. Vander Zander defines assimilation as "a process whereby groups with diverse ways of thinking, feeling and acting become fused together in a social unity and a common culture". There are two components of assimilation . Integration implies equal access and the end of segregation, while acculturation refers to the fusion of groups into a common culture. Accomodation, yet another process, may relate to the adoption of outward

superficial elements of the new culture, while old independent , cultural patterns of the contending groups are retained. Our focus will remain broadly on social identity and assimilation.

Culture. What then is this phenomenon that "soc.culture.indian" does or does not preserve? Triandis (1977) defines culture as the man-made part of the human environment. His classification of culture into two components allows a more accurate description of its influence on interpersonal relationships.

A) Objective culture contains such social indicators as names of things, language, ethnicity, sex, education, dress, food, and customs of social behavior.(Smith & Luce, 1969). The indicants are obvious, and, in general, what are considered relevant when cultural differences are discussed by the public. It is these indicants that can be more clearly evidenced in textual contexts such as the ones analyzed.

B) Subjective culture is the component that defines an individual's internal characteristics in perceiving and judging his/her social environment. Such mental activities are usually not directly observed. The presence of these indicants can only be implied through the analysis of message content.

Culture shock, then, can be defined as the removal or distortion of familiar cues to social behavior, and is experienced by most people who spend any length of time away interacting with different cultural backgrounds. It is characterized by shaking hands, not knowing what to say when meeting people or making purchases, confusion about words, gestures, facial expressions, customs and norms.(Oberg, 1979).

According to Kundera (1984), if the identity of a people is seriously undermined, cultural life grows correspondingly more important and vital, until culture itself becomes the fundamental value around which people rally. Societies "where the dominant majority is bent on a policy of cultural assimilation, as has been the case in the United States" may witness an increase in the cultural vitality among its ethnic groups.(Smolicz, 1988). This may give further credence to our view on the role of the CBBS as a means to achieve this integration.

The Ethnic Press. At this stage, where we are still trying to determine if the exchange of ideas and ethnicity through a medium of communication, whether electronic or print does indeed have a link with assimilation, the ethnic or foreign language press of ethnic groups provides us with a historical parallel. The International Encyclopedia of Social Sciences defines ethnic groups as "a distinct category of the population in a larger society whose culture is usually different from its own".

The foreign press of the immigrants was viewed by some as an impediment to the speedy Americanization of the new immigrants, and on the other hand, an important aid to assimilation. According to those who held the first view, it was considered to :

> "isolate immigrants from American society by perpetuating the use of their native languages and supporting their ethnic traditions. It helped maintain unity among members of the national group and helped preserve nationalistic feelings, thus insulating them from the wider society. By offering news of their native countries, the press promoted identification with the Old World instead of the New. In short, the foreign-language press preserved feelings of separateness." (Kessler, p 92, 1984).

Opponents of this argument argued that the foreign press was in fact an important aid to assimilation. A number of researchers have claimed that the ethnic press shows a more genuine interest in the welfare of their clients and establish more personal and helpful ties with their readers. They serve as a reliable disseminator of needed information by championing social reforms that directly benefit the ethnic community and by striving to educate their readers in the ways of American life, aid their assimilation. According to Oscar Handlin (1951):

> "Reading a foreign language newspaper was a step in the Americanization of the immigrant. It helped him interpret the issues and events of the day and provided him with the information he needed to operate in the community and the larger society he had entered."(Handlin, 1951)

A balance of the two conflicting notions is required to be able to understand the true nature of the ethnic press. According to Park, (1922), the immigrant's contribution would strengthen the workings of the pluralistic democratic system.

> " the immigrant wants to preserve, as far as possible, his heritages from the old country. These are represented pre-eminently by his language and his religion. At the same time, he wants to participate in the common life and find a place in the American community. In these two motives we have at once the problem of the foreign language press and its solution. (26, p. 468).

Of course, major differences need to be drawn between these immigrants and the groups we are studying. Unlike the immigrants who were here for to find a new life for themselves, many users of the group have at least the stated objective of returning to their country.(Klineberg& Hull, 1979). Another major difference is that the language of the medium is English, which is understood by the largest cross-section of Indians, unlike the ethnic press that mostly tended to be a foreign language press. However, Indian languages and dialects do figure prominently in the messages posted especially in the form of poetry, overcoming the script difference by a phonetic conversion.

Thus we can conjecture that the CBBS will serve in this instance not only to soften the culture shock that will be felt in the first few months of the student's arrival, but also cushion the impact when he returns to the country of his origin, by keeping him abreast with events and issues and well supplied with large doses of Indian culture.

Study of content of messages. According to Danowski, (1982) the most central aspect of human communication processes are the messages people exchange and the meaning they attach to symbolic message elements. The computer printouts of 211 messages were obtained for manual coding. Using computer-monitored data in communication research has advantages that have been noted.by many researchers. (Rice & Danowski, 1981; Rice & Rogers, 1984; Rice & Borgman, 1983). Some of them are:

1) the ability to automate data collection

2) unobtrusive collection of accurate data (no response bias)

3) availability of full census data

4) longitudinal data and

5) the capability of setting up automated experiments

In the context of the present study, advantages 4) and 5) were not exploited, but may prove to be useful for future research purposes. Disadvantages include extensive data management and potential privacy and ethics concerns. (Rice & Borgman, 1983). Yet another disadvantage of large discrepancies between reported and actual communication behavior, (Bernard, Killworth and Sailor, 1981) need be mentioned only in passing since it does not pertain to this study.

According to Culnan and Bair, (1983) successful implementation of CMC includes the following,

a) maintaining an adequate level of use, (this is evidenced by the prolific message traffic)

b) terminal and system availability (obviously available to students, especially those in engineering and computer science related disciplines with access to computers),

d) a clear need to use the system (surveillance, diversionary, cultural identity needs of the individual and social integrative are some of the uses have been hypothesized in this context)

e) a critical mass of users (this would include other network users)

It can thus be argued that all these are present in the "soc.india. culture." network. Further, geographical dispersion as an influence in choosing this computer-mediated communication system comes into play here as another reason why this CBBS was implemented.(Steinfield & Fulk, 1986).

Categories of Analysis.Each individual message was taken as the unit of analysis. Existing literature of media uses was studied before choosing categories of analysis. (Blumler, 1979; McLeod,Bybee, & Durall, 1982; Rubin, 1981). While adopting conventional media use studies, it was realized that though media technologies are new, our fundamental human uses of them are not necessarily so (Williams & Rice, 1983). It was hoped that by identifying the needs that the bulletin board were fulfilling, some insight could be gained into the role that this new form of communication was playing. Some of the main themes are:

a) surveillance

b) diversionary

c) cultural identity needs of the individual

d) social integrative

Surveillance needs, which are part of cognitive needs, have been identified as those that reflect the individual's desire for information, knowledge and understanding about some feature of society. The many 'postings' dealing with news and events may be described as serving this function. It has been posited that the breadth and depth of the information content in CBBSs is rather circumscribed as compared to the traditional media.(Garramone et al.,1986). However, in cases where traditional sources of information (such as Indian newspapers and newsmagazines, due to geographical distance, takes a long time to reach, CBBS may serve as an excellent means by which to be 'the first with the news.' The feature of interactivity further allows an opportunity to exchange views about the event (as has been mentioned in the 'two-step flow' argument). In our study, the near-monopoly of the bulletin board as a source of information of the reference group (in terms of a shared pool of collective experience) is unrivalled by traditional media (such as newspapers) and hence may cause it to re-emerge in importance.

Diversionary needs include escape and entertainment. Existing research on computerized bulletin boards that are not oriented around a professional group or task clearly demonstrates the playful nature of interaction. The heavy use of jargon and false identities (or handles) are examples of play behavior. (Myers, 1985b). Chesebro (1985) studied the most recent 10 messages from 14 public computer bulletin boards (CBBS) and found that 32% were interpersonal in nature. Myers (1985c) analyzed two CBBS and found half of all messages were "general discussion": jokes, insults, sexual topics, games, stories and personal information constituted 29% and 39% respectively, of the content of the system. Use of a great deal of jargon may be indicative of play behavior, too. (Myers, 1985b)

Cultural identity for the individual reflect the individual's needs to establish a "social location" in relation to others in society. Discussions of the common culture, as well as shared activities in which the common origin and culture are significant would be included here. Two unique features of CBBSs may facilitate the satisfaction of cultural identity needs for the individual. First, the CBBS user is physically alone with the terminal which may lead to a letting down of barriers (Hills and Turoff, 1978). Second, CBBS users may choose not to use their real names, which may lead to the honest opinions (Phillips, 1983). The aloneness and anonymity features of CBBSs, therefore, may lead the user to open up, connecting him even more intimately to others in society.

Social integrative needs are those that are used for strengthening contacts with family and friends.Steinfield (1985) found that "newer and younger employees were more likely to use the system for entertainment and nontask uses, leading Steinfeld to conclude that these people were perhaps using electronic mail to become socially integrated into the argument. Combined value of the system to facilitate communication increases geometrically as the network of users grows.(Rice, 1982, 84). Given the high usership of "soc.culture.indian", this could serve as an effective resource for making and strengthening contacts. The oft-occuring message "looking for a friend" serves to illustrate the trust placed in the efficacy of the network reaching the sought person.

Hiltz (1980; 1984) elaborates on the importance of the social context in predicting use. She observes that the best predictor of use is group membership (Hiltz, 1980). Hiltz (1984) maintains that "being a member of one group (or subculture) rather than another seems to shape the experience of the members and the quality of their (electronic) life.' Other effects seen are what Hiltz and her colleagues call disinhibition and deindividuation (defined as the tendency to rely less on one's own opinion and conform more to group opinions and norms). These findings may be of considerable relevance to the attempts of the individual to establish a "social location" in society. He may use the group norms as a source of established attitudes and shape his own behavior accordingly.

It can be conjectured that computer mediated communication affects the nature of face to face communication. On the one hand it can be said to reduce the need of the network user for actual face to face interaction with other reference group members, as the socio-psychological needs have been met. More likely, though, is the increased reliance on and effectiveness of interpersonal interaction as both the actual content and the issues raised in the electronic discussions becomes the topic of actual conversation. The role of personal influence in the 'two step flow' has been well documented, (Lazarsfeld & Katz,1955) and here it can be conjectured that the bulletin board may help the individual to tap into other individuals who are 'opinion leaders' by providing him with insight into some of the issues that are relevant.

Procedure. The time period chosen for studying messages was Oct 19 to Oct 25. In this time period, 211 messages were entered into the "soc.culture.indian" bulletin board. The first 15 messages of each day were chosen to be studied,which resulted in 105 messages in all. Though this does not purport to be a random sample, it is hoped that it will serve to describe the relative importance of various factors we are examining. Steinfield (1986) classifies the use of computer-monitored data from CMC systems to four main approaches:

1). Use of electronic mail to distribute and collect questionnaires;

2). content analysis of electronic message transcripts by human coders;

3). use of message sender / recipient information to identify communication links for subsequent analysis of sociometric structure and

4). use of the system to monitor the amount of each users message traffic.

A fifth approach with considerable promise is the use of the computer to conduct an automated content analysis of message transcripts.

The second approach was employed in this study as messages were classified by a human coder into the categories described.

To begin with, the messages were divided into those dealing with issues that dealt with a) American issues in America, b) Indian issues in America and c) Indian issues in India. These categories were similar to those used by Siddiqi (1987) in a content analysis of the Indian ethnic press. 2 messages (1.9%) dealt exclusively with a). Out of the remaining b)s and c)s, the messages were divided into the categories of assimilation, (to examine our first hypothesis) and surveillance, diversionary, cultural identity needs for the individual and social integration (to determine 'needs' and test our second hypothesis). The preponderance of surveillance needs would cause the bulletin board to be classified as a 'newsgroup' whereas the preponderance of the others would cause it to be classified as a 'supportgroup'.

Assimilation. 18 instances (17.1%) that supported the category dealing with assimilation (into the host country). Obviously, the 'netters', (when they are using the bulletin board), are far more interested in social integration within the peer group of fellow netters rather than in assimilation into the mainstream dominant culture it is surrounded by. Some of the entries that were included in this category were 'visa' information, requests to support the passing of immigration bills, and some references to the differences between Indian English and American and British English.

Surveillance. 14 instances (13.33%)that supported this category were included. These were messages that dealt with news in India and all comments and replies to these. There were largely news and discussions of current affairs in India.

Diversionary. 5 instances (4.8%) that supported this category were included. These included those that told jokes, were entertaining and generally humorous.

Cultural identity needs for the individual. 41 instances (39%) that supported this category were included. These included those messages that expressed opinions on some matter, responded to another message that had an opinion or asked for the opinion of others. Many discussions on religion, language and regionalism were noticed -- the objectifications of 'culture', as per Triandis, perhaps. Interestingly, many of the problems of religion, caste, language and region that are objects of heated discussion in India seem to have been transferred to the American continent and are mirrored in the messages.

Social Integrative 25 instances (23.8%)that supported this category were included. These included messages such as those looking for friends, or those addressed specifically to a particular group, such as those from a particular alma mater.

Findings.

The presence of a great deal of jargon and "flaming" in the messages has been reported in other studies. In ours, too, there was a high degree of flammatory language. Communicating alone at the terminal can be dangerously liberating -- the likeliest flamer is the "Twinkie-eating programmer alone at 2 a.m.", says J. Solomon in an article in the Wall Street Journal. One flame may lead to another, leading to an escalating exchange of what Next Inc. staffers call "nastygrams." Certainly a great deal of this was in evidence in the sample that was studied.

In view of the available research (Short, et al., 1976) available that posits that the use of CMC (with its low bandwidth) is not the best of media to tackle tasks that require personal and/or sensitive information, the use of CBBS is probably not suited to many of the discussions on caste, religion and regional differences that it generates. Still, considering the geographical dispersion, coupled with impecunity of most of its users (mainly students) it is highly improbable that in the absence of this forum, a very real need would have been left unfulfilled.

Reservations. The above methodology implies several threats to the validity of the study. The first is the lack of temporal context as no information is available on the length of time the sampled persons had been using the system (Love & Rice, 1985) or even in the country. It is thus difficult to impute any temporal relationship, such as study the validity of the U-curve hypothesis of attitude towards the host country. Also, the "non-independence of messages", both by person and across people, is a threat to statistical inference; and has been realized as such in attempts at network analysis. The implications for this study are that it is not possible to separate out influences from prior content or the content of other individual's messages.(Love & Rice, 1985),and neither are later messages that are a response to the sampled messages. The sample is thus 'right and left censored', and the obvious weakness of this kind of 'snapshot' picture analysis of what is obviously a dynamic, interactive process of linked interactions are obvious. Further, results are based on only those users who sent (or posted) messages (not the 'lurkers'), and so may have failed to capture the entire range of uses that these bulletin boards are used for.

Summary

Thus, our sample study proved both our first hypothesis (that the bulletin board would be less a medium of assimilation to and more a medium of integration within the peer group, given the use of the bulletin board as a means of preserving cultural identity during their sojourn). It can be conjectured that one of the reasons is that some of the users intend to leave. Our second hypothesis (that the bulletin board would serve less as a 'newsgroup' and more as a 'supportgroup', as defined by the categories) too was borne out.

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